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TWO SPEECHES OF THOMAS DAY, Esq.

AT THE

GENERAL MEETINGS

OF THE

COUNTIES OF CAMBRIDGE AND ESSEX,

Held March 25, and April 25, 1780.

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THE SPEECH OF THOMAS DAY, ESQ. AT THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE FREEHOLDERS OF THE COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE,

Held on SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 1780.

GENTLEMEN,

IT is with peculiar pleaſure that I meet you in a place which ought to be the aſylum of public virtue and manly independence; the patron of every generous reformation; the open and avowed enemy of civil and religious tyranny. Upon other occaſions I might have contented myſelf with barely ſtating the expedience of the preſent meaſure; here I ſhall expatiate in a wider field, and call your attention to the great principles of political ſociety, as if before the firſt tribunal in the world I were pleading the cauſe of human nature againſt the advocates of oppreſſion.

The end and object of all political ſociety are the happineſs and ſecurity of the whole; the means are theſe regulations which have been found agreeable to the wiſdom and experience of the people; the conduct of rulers may indeed be warped from this great end to low and illiberal ſelfiſhneſs, and mankind from ignorance or indolence may tolerate the abuſe; but nothing can deſtroy the claim; and the pride and folly of individuals might as well pretend to engroſs the air, the light, the warmth of heaven, as juſtly to confine all powers and privileges of government to that narrow circle which has in moſt countries monopolized them.

With this view of things I ſhall never carry the merited reſpect I bear to nobles, magiſtrates, or kings themſelves, to any ſpecies of idolatry; I

ſhall never miſtake the inſtrument for the end, or confound the good and ſafety of mankind with the intereſt of particular bodies, or the ambition of individuals. Neither magiſtrate nor ſovereign has any natural claim to allegiance; while he executes the duties of his office conformably to the will of thoſe who have appointed him, he deſerves reſpect, eſteem, ſupport; the inſtant he deviates from theſe, and converts his power to private inſtead of public ends, he is no more to be endured than a mortification, becauſe it has begun in ſome noble or uſeful organ of the body.

What I am now advancing is equally agreeable to the dictates of reaſon and the practice of the Engliſh conſtitution. Many inſtances may be brought from hiſtory, of Kings who have been ſolemnly depoſed for not performing the duties of their office, or for infringing the liberties of the people. But the laſt great revolution of our government is a deciſive precedent, that ſubjects may alter their rulers, and that kings muſt expect allegiance no longer than they deſerve it.

Gentlemen, I will not conſume your time with ſtudied panegyrics upon the excellence of that conſtitution under which we live; this only I will obſerve, that no ſyſtem can be imagined more conſiſtent with natural rights; none, in which they have been more thoroughly inveſtigated, or more accurately defined.

In other countries, the cauſes and pretexts of oppreſſion are thoſe diſcretionary powers with which the ſupreme magiſtrate is inveſted; for the uſe of which he is accountable to heaven alone. With us no diſcretionary power which can affect the life, the property, or the liberty of an individual, is permitted to the ſovereign himſelf. We have a right to ſpeak our ſentiments with a tempered, but an honeſt boldneſs; no reſtraint can be put upon our perſonal freedom, unleſs we have committed crimes which make us unworthy to enjoy it, nor can our property be wreſted from us, under the plea of ſtate neceſſity, without at leaſt the appearance of our own conſent. And leſt the laws themſelves, by being too near the influence of the ſupreme magiſtrate, ſhould be perverted to our annoyance, it is provided that not the meaneſt wretch that begs his bread, ſhall be obnoxious to the public vengeance, without the conſent of his equals.—Yes, gentlemen, I repeat it, becauſe it is a glorious privilege which cannot be too often mentioned to you; that not all the rich, the great, the powerful of this nation, in a conſpiracy for that purpoſe, can oppreſs the meaneſt of this aſſembly, ſo long as he ſhall appear innocent to a jury of his fellow citizens, and they ſhall dare to exert their own undoubted privilege of aſcertaining both law and fact.

If there needed any additional proof, I would refer you to thoſe great original charters of our freedom, which have been forced from our unwilling kings, and confirmed at every period of our hiſtory. I would refer you to the declaration of rights, that renovation of our conſtitution, which is the baſis of the preſent eſtabliſhment; and which I do affirm, not all the united force of the legiſlature can reſcind, or overturn, without at the ſame time diſſolving the government, and forfeiting all title to allegiance.

Should it be aſked, why I introduce theſe things in an aſſembly which is convened for the expreſs purpoſe of petitioning for a reform in the public expenditure? this is my anſwer, There is no one privilege of this people,

people, which has not been publicly called in queſtion, nor one which will not be wreſted from them, if they are contented to reſign it. All abuſes ariſe, either from the ignorance of mankind in reſpect to what they may juſtly claim, or from their indolence in aſſerting that claim; he therefore that would ſave, muſt firſt enlighten; I know no method more effectual to preſerve a nation from arbitrary deſign on the one hand, and from factious councils on the other, than to teach it the preciſe extent and boundary of its own rights.

Men that have either property or privileges are always attentive to preſerve them, and intereſted to ſupport that government which maintains them; while ſlaves and beggars, to whom neither the world, nor the world's law is a friend, are always ripe for change, and ready to throw all things into confuſion.

Beſides, when after all the waſte of blood and treaſure, which the preſent calamitous war has occaſioned, we are called upon to riſk the laſt ſtake we poſſeſs, for the ſervice of our country, it ſurely becomes us to enquire, whether we have a country. For I do not call the air we breathe, nor the ſoil we trample upon a country, nor the ſcanty fare which ſupports you for daily toils; but I call that a country, in which men poſſeſs an equal ſhare in their own government, and privileges which are inviolable; he therefore that lays before you the noble rights which are inherent in you, as Engliſhmen, ſtimulates you moſt effectually to their defence.

I now, gentlemen, enter upon the more immediate occaſion of the preſent aſſembly, the grievances of the nation, and their probable means of redreſs; and that I may the more clearly expreſs my ſentiments upon the ſubject, I muſt purſue them to their very ſource. The natural and conſtitutional defence of this country has, during many ages, conſiſted in its Parliaments. The glorious ſtruggles, which thoſe illuſtrious bodies had repeatedly made in favour of the people, the conſtant vigilance which they had oppoſed to the encroachments of the crown, left our anceſtors no room to imagine, that a time might come when their repreſentatives would ſurrender up all thoſe privileges they were choſen to defend, into thoſe very hands againſt which they were choſen to defend them, and no precaution was taken againſt an evil which was not foreſeen.

Charles II. whoſe name in common with that of every Stuart I deteſt, ſet the firſt example of public corruption; a practice which has been too ſucceſsfully adopted in ſucceeding reigns. Our kings, grown wiſe by the misfortunes of their predeceſſors, no longer attempted the liberties of their ſubjects by open violence, but attacked them by the more ſecret and pernicious method of undermining the conſtitution; and the immenſe revenues of which the crown has been left the unqueſtioned diſtributor, has enabled it to corrupt the repreſentatives of the people, and to poiſon the fountains of public ſafety at their very ſource. Since that pernicious æra the evils, under which we now labour, have been renewed or increaſed with every returning ſeſſions. We have ſeen wars begun and waged, not for the ſafety or intereſt of the people, but from the ſelfiſh views and ambition of the crown; our burthens increaſed beyond our abilities to bear them, and without any hopes of their ever becoming lighter, encreaſed till private opulence, induſtry, and commerce are at an end. A variety of acts, all tending to abridge the public liberty, have

been impoſed. Among theſe, I ſhall enumerate the riot act, made as was pretended to ſerve a temporary purpoſe, but, like every other oppreſſion, rendered perpetual; the game laws, by which the great body of the people is diſarmed, although it is an expreſs article of the declaration of rights that ſubjects may have arms for their defence; and the exciſe, that ſyſtem of public robbery, which now extends to every article of neceſſity and convenience, by which the moſt innocent and indifferent actions of our lives are ſubjected to controul. But the moſt daring violation of our rights is that infamous act, by which a Parliament is now permitted to endure ſeven years, by which the creatures and ſervants of the people took upon them to extend the term of their own delegated exiſtence, and curtail their electors of more than half their prerogatives, although it is evident they might as well have voted themſelves perpetual dictators, and levelled the whole conſtitution at a ſingle ſtroke. To complete the whole, a ſtanding army, that peſt of human ſociety, that baneful engine which has never failed to annihilate the liberties of every country where it was once admitted, is now interwoven with the government, and become a continually encreaſing evil.

Thus, in the latter ages of the Roman empire, all thoſe offices of truſt and honour which uſed to invigorate the whole republic, were concentrated in the perſon of the Emperor, ſo, in the Britiſh government, with the forms, but againſt the ſpirit of the conſtitution, have many of our moſt material rights and immunities been ſurrendered to the crown. To the crown belongs the diſpoſition of honours and emoluments; the immenſe influence ariſing from the army, the navy, the exciſe, and the civil liſt; the rights of peace and war, and the diſpoſal of all the armed force in the kingdom: to us is left the taſk of paying ſoldiers to enſlave, and repreſentatives to betray; accompanied with the mournful ſpectacle of ſeeing all our rights put up to public auction, once in ſeven years. Nor let any one here confound the jealouſy of the office with diſreſpect for the perſon of our Sovereign; the objects are in their own nature as different as can be conceived; and the greateſt idolater of the private virtues of a King may be the moſt rigid inquiſitor of the leaſt augmentation of his powers; ſince the bleſſings of the one are, like their author, of ſhort and uncertain duration, while the evils which may ariſe from the other are as laſting as its continuance. The object of our preſent petition is a particular branch of that baneful tree, whoſe fruits have brought death and ruin into our political world; it is for a reform in the public expenditure, than which nothing can be imagined more juſt in itſelf, or more neceſſary to be at preſent urged. Shame and ruin are the inevitable conſequences of public as well as private prodigality; and no man can be expected to contribute freely to the ſervice of his country, till he is convinced, that, in the words of the preſent Speaker of the Houſe of Commons, what was liberally beſtowed ſhould be wiſely applied; and as I am no ſpeaker in the Houſe of Commons, nor in expectation of a chief juſtice-ſhip, I may perhaps add, honeſtly.

Who, indeed, ever will caſt the moſt ſuperficial view upon the public accounts for the laſt century, will ſee ſuch waſte and profuſion of the people's property, ſuch a ſhameful compliance with the moſt exorbitant demands of the crown, ſuch a neglect, or rather ſuch a determined oppoſition

poſition to every public enquiry, ſuch a connivance at fraud, ſuch a ſympathy with guilt, that he will be equally aſtoniſhed at the audacity of our parliaments which have dared to mortgage the public credit for two hundred millions, and at the patience of this people which has ſuffered it.

The objections which are brought againſt the preſent meaſure, are almoſt too frivolous to deſerve an anſwer. We are told that this is no time to weaken the hands of miniſters, but rather to arm them with additional powers; no time to deliberate about our grievances, but to act with vigour againſt the foe: but, ſurely, he beſt enables this nation to exert its vigour againſt the foe, who removes the obſtacles which have hitherto impeded it; and as to additional powers, before we grant them, it is, perhaps, expedient to demand ſome account of thoſe we have already confided. No government can be formidable to external foes, till it is loved and reſpected at home, and no government can be loved or reſpected at home, till it merit the confidence, and grant the honeſt wiſhes of the people. We know too well, that the only hopes of redreſs are in the hour of anxiety and danger, when the weight of the people is felt in the ſcale of empires, and miniſters themſelves are afraid to exaſperate beyond a certain point. Nor are we ignorant with what diſdain the petitions of the nation againſt the exciſe, againſt the ſeptennial bill, and for expelling the dependents of the crown from amongſt our repreſentatives, and for every uſeful reform, has been treated for the laſt century. The hour is now come, when you muſt aſſert your ſuperintending power in the government, or abandon it for ever. Public abuſes, gentlemen, never correct themſelves; on the contrary, for having once been tolerated, they become inveterate; and though no fairneſs of title, or antiquity of poſſeſſion, was ever able to prevent a government from encroaching upon the privileges of their ſubjects; yet, to have intermitted the claim for a ſingle inſtant, is often made a reaſon againſt the people for refuſing that claim for ever.

For theſe reaſons, I muſt end as I have begun, with exhorting you to bend the whole weight of your attention to the reform of public abuſes, and the renewal of the conſtitution. This can only be done by ſhortening the duration of Parliaments, and by introducing a more equal repreſentation. When theſe points have been obtained, the nation will be enabled to exert all the wiſdom, valour, and reſolution it poſſeſſes, in its own defence; and if we fail then, we deſerve to fall for ever. Till then, every inferior reformation is leſs than nothing; it is ſhutting the gates, when the enemy are in poſſeſſion of the walls, or ſtopping a chink in the publick mounds, when the tide of ſhame and ruin is pouring in at a thouſand breaches. In our preſent circumſtances, it is an inſult to common ſenſe, a mockery of our feelings, to ſay that we are repreſented; there is not a ſingle idea attached to the term, a ſingle definition which can be given of it, which is not groſsly violated in the election of an Houſe of Commons; nor is there a ſingle argument which can be brought, to prove that Houſe repreſents Great Britain, by which it may not equally be proved, that it repreſents France, Spain, the Indies, all Europe, or the world itſelf.

Theſe, gentlemen, are, or ought to be, the ends of your meetings and aſſociations; they are the great ends to which you are called by every ho-

neſt and independent man, who, ſolely intent upon his country's good, looks down with equal indifference both on miniſters and oppoſitions; who aſks no favour, ſolicits no patronage, and, while he ſcorns alike to lend his aid to power or faction, devotes himſelf a willing victim to the public cauſe. Nor think that I am exhorting you to a dangerous, although a difficult, undertaking; I know that there are times, when the public evils are ſo deſperate as to deter even honeſt men from attempting a cure; but theſe times are not yet arrived; and that they never may, I exhort you not to loſe the preſent moment. Let your petitions be expreſſed with a decent, but a manly boldneſs; let your voices riſe, not like the voices of a tumultuous rabble, a name with which you are always honoured by the ſycophants of a Court, who are raiſed upon the public ſpoils to inſult the public calamities, but with the irreſiſtible force of a well-diſciplined army, that neither provokes nor fears hoſtilities.

After a calm of the longeſt duration, the ſpirit of the people is at length excited, and I ſee a ſtorm gathering, which may be fatal to its enemies. It is yours, ye free and independent citizens, ye uncorrupted remains of a wiſe and valiant people, to direct this tide of national zeal to its proper object, not to ſuffer it to be diverted into a thouſand ſcanty ſtreams, but to roll it full againſt the loftieſt bulwarks of oppreſſion; they will not reſiſt its rage, they will be levelled with the ground, and leave you an eaſy victory, attended with the ſublimeſt glory which mortals can attain, that of being the *patres patriæ*, the ſaviours of your country, and the reſtorers of public liberty.

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THE SPEECH OF THOMAS DAY, ESQ. AT THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE FREEHOLDERS OF THE COUNTY OF ESSEX, Held on TUESDAY, APRIL 25, 1780.

GENTLEMEN,

UPON this occaſion, which may probably be the laſt I ſhall have to addreſs you, I cannot avoid pouring out my whole mind before you, with all the freedom which becomes an honeſt man. In times of common danger and diſtreſs, it is the duty of every one that poſſeſſes activity or courage, to exert it for the ſervice of his country; and ſurely there never has been a period in our hiſtory which more required the exertion of every talent and every virtue than the preſent; a period which ſtands unrivalled and alone for the exceſs of national calamity which has burſt upon us, and threatens our deſtruction. We ſtand upon a narrow iſthmus, aſſailed on either ſide by tempeſtuous oceans; here, by a league of injured friends and ancient enemies, mutually exaſperated to our ruin; there, by an internal conſpiracy againſt our liberties, more formidable, and more to be dreaded than all the open attacks of hoſtile invaſion. Nor has the progreſſion from good to evil been gradual, ſuch as allowed us time to familiarize ourſelves with danger, or to take precautions againſt its approach: but in the hour of triumph, proſperity, and exultation, when we deemed ourſelves ſecure from fortune, and almoſt from fate itſelf, even then the wound was given, which has already reached the vitals of our country. Into what an abyſs of ſhame, and from what an height of glory are we fallen!—We awake from our dreams of conqueſt and dominion to find ourſelves the miſerable victims of our own ambition; to find the evils which we had prepared for others recoiling upon our own heads; and nothing left on which we can depend, beyond the ſcanty limits of our iſland, and all the ſcenes of indigence, oppreſſion, and deſpair, which they contain.

In this ſtate of things, many gentlemen of the moſt honourable and independent character have thought it proper to appeal to the great body of the people. They have remarked, with ſilent anguiſh, how little could be expected from the feeble hand which has uſurped the helm; how long we had driven at the mercy of every blaſt, without a port to receive, or

even

even a ſtar to guide us on our courſe; and on this diſtreſs, they nobly and juſtly thought, that forms and ceremonies and reſpect muſt yield to the extremity of our danger. From theſe motives they have in the different parts of this kingdom convened the great body of the people; that body which is the ſupreme tribunal at which all government ſhould be tried, as it is the only end for which government can rightfully exiſt. This, gentlemen, has been the origin of your county meetings, your petitions, your aſſociations; ſubjects on which ſuch falſe and ſenſeleſs calumnies have been propagated, by thoſe who wiſh to ſee the ſafety of a people ſacrificed to the indolence, luxury, or ambition of a few. But till theſe gentlemen can ſhew me a ſingle ſtate which has preſerved its liberty a moment longer than the people have aſſerted their claim to ſuperintend, controul, and alter the adminiſtration of public affairs; or a ſingle inſtance of any ſtate which has been delivered from impending ruin, unleſs by the general virtue and courage of its citizens, I ſhall perſiſt in thinking this meaſure moſt fit, moſt honourably adapted to our preſent exigencies, and deſerving every mark of public gratitude and eſteem. Yes, gentlemen, let neither ſophiſtry deceive, nor violence deter you from the acknowledgment of this great truth, that forms, and titles, and governments themſelves are lighter than the ſummer's duſt, when weighed againſt the general ſafety, or the general freedom; that this is the great and indefeaſible claim of all the ſpecies, not founded upon charters, or granted it by kings, but ſtamped indelibly upon our nature by the eternal Author of its exiſtence.

Under the influence of this conviction, I have already attended various meetings in different parts of the kingdom, and delivered ſuch ſentiments as I thought became me to ſpeak, and free-born men to hear: yet I truſt that I ſhall continue to act as I have begun, till the public cauſe become deſperate, and you ſubmit to voluntary ſlavery; for I have caſt every conſideration of ſafety, eaſe, or intereſt behind; I care not what may be the private conſequences to myſelf, whom I may irritate, or what faction I may offend; and call every body of men, whether in poſſeſſion of power, or excluded from it, whether denominated Miniſtry, or Oppoſition, a faction, which heſitates to ſubſcribe to theſe ſelf-evident truths, which form the baſis of all human ſociety.

The oſtenſible object of your meetings was a petition for a reform in the public expenditure; a meaſure rendered abſolutely neceſſary by the ſhameleſs profuſion exerciſed in every department of public expence, by the decay of commerce, the intolerable increaſe of your burthens, and the continuance of the pernicious civil war; the miſeries of which are felt by every man, but its immediate authors. But however neceſſary might be the meaſure, I muſt here publicly confeſs, that had I bounded my hopes with the mere objects of the firſt petition, I ſhould no more have intereſted myſelf in its fate, than in a project for a turnpike-road, or a navigable canal. To believe that a particular ſet of men have, by their miſconduct, ignorance, and corruption, produced the evils we now endure, and are intereſted in their continuance; and then to aſk that they will deviate from the unvaried tenor of their former lives, and remedy by their virtue thoſe calamities which they have occaſioned by their venality, is to

petition

petition a band of robbers to return thoſe ſpoils which they have juſt hazarded their lives to acquire.

But I was convinced that the origin of the public misfortunes, however induſtriouſly concealed, would be ſufficiently obvious to the eye of even ordinary penetration: and that the attention of the people, when once turned to the conſideration of their own diſtreſſes, would eaſily trace the ſeries of events, which they all remember, to one common ſource. I had remarked, during a period of many years, our plaineſt and beſt eſtabliſhed rights invaded, our dutiful and moderate petitions ſcorned, obnoxious characters patronized, and odious ſyſtems purſued, till a wider gulf had been placed between the Sovereign's and the people's friends, than ſeparated Lazarus and Dives in the Scriptures; I had ſeen the flames of civil war kindled in an inſtant, between the ſubjects of the ſame Government and Empire; and in the proſecution of this diſaſtrous conteſt, all charters diſregarded, all rights confounded, all principles of natural equity and reaſon ſubverted, as if the only object of all the orders of the ſtate were to extinguiſh oppoſition to the will of an individual:——all this I had obſerved, nor could I attribute ſo baneful a combination of circumſtances to any lighter cauſe, than ſome corruption in the government, ſo vaſt and glaring, as to be diſcernible by every eye. Nor have I been deceived in my expectations; the almoſt unanimous voice of the people, echoed back for once by their repreſentatives, has decided, "*that the influence of the "Crown has been increaſed, is encreaſing, and ought to be diminiſhed.*" In the ſame ſpirit have been the reports of committees and delegates, and the memorials they have publiſhed, agreeing in this point, and aſſerting the conſtitutional claim of the Engliſh people to a ſhorter duration of Parliaments, and a more equal repreſentation.

Thus far, gentlemen, is well: and I congratulate you with the ſincereſt pleaſure upon the ſucceſs with which your virtuous endeavours have been already attended. May what you have already gained, be only a prelude to that complete redreſs, which can alone reſtore the power and freedom of this nation, by reſtoring the Conſtitution to its original purity. The moſt arduous part of the enterprize is already atchieved; ſince it is more difficult to rouze a people from habitual indolence and ſupineneſs, than to direct their attention, when once awakened, to the nobleſt purpoſe. But if you think that your toils are already over; if you miſtake the firſt conſternation of your enemies for a defeat, and neglect to improve your advantage; if you content yourſelves with that unwilling acquieſcence of your repreſentatives, which has been extorted from them by the proximity of a General Election, I cannot help foretelling that you will only increaſe your grievances, inſtead of diminiſhing their weight. Be aſſured that power, office, and emoluments are fruits of that intoxicating taſte, as never to be willingly reſigned; and of all the uſurpations that have been made upon the liberties of mankind, no one was ever given back, ſo long as it was poſſible to retain it. Unleſs, therefore, you will perſiſt in what you have ſo well begun, unleſs you will purſue the glorious buſineſs, with all the energy and vigour which become men who would ſucceed in the nobleſt undertakings, it would have been better never to have entered the liſts than to faint before you reach the goal.—But do not faint before you reach the gaol of freedom and of glory! Do not, I

conjure

conjure you, by all your country's wrong, by all your own; by the hopes of freedom for yourſelves, your children, your lateſt poſterity; by the dread of ſhame and infamy, and perpetual chains; by every ſentiment, paſſion, and principle, which ought to inſpire the minds of free-born men, and ſtimulate them to action!—You have for your incentives, the accumulated miſeries which ſurround you; for rewards, the nobleſt prize which can be propoſed to human daring; for leaders and companions, all the virtuous, and many of the great and powerful; or ſhould the great and powerful meanly deſert you, deſpiſe their baſeneſs, and follow your native energy and courage.

But, while I am exhorting you to perſevere till you have obtained a perfect redreſs of grievances, it is neceſſary that I ſhould explain what I mean by ſuch redreſs. You all know, that the conſtitutional government of this country is veſted in the Sovereign, an hereditary body of Nobles, and an elective Houſe of Commons, which is the repreſentative of the people. The conſent of theſe three independent powers is abſolutely neceſſary for every legiſlative purpoſe. But as the great body of the people can never aim at any thing more than its own proſperity, ſafety, and freedom, we need not fear the nation ſhould ſuſtain any material injury, ſo long as repreſentatives deliver the ſenſe of thoſe they repreſent; more eſpecially, as, in the ordinary courſe of government, the people ſeldom aſſembling for any other purpoſe than that of chuſing their delegates, are preſerved from thoſe ſudden impulſes of caprice, or paſſion, which have ſometimes proved pernicious to popular governments. But ſhould the pretended repreſentatives of the people, contrary to the intent of their inſtitution, be perverted to expreſs merely the will of an individual, or a faction, it is evident, that the people would loſe their natural importance, and the government itſelf be changed to an abſolute monarchy, or an oligarchy of the worſt kind: an abſolute monarchy, or an oligarchy founded upon public diſtreſs and ruin; ſince it would be neceſſary to pillage the people, in order to bribe thoſe who betray them; to decive and corrupt them leſt they ſhould demand redreſs; and to diſarm all the honeſt and independent, leſt they ſhould be able to obtain it. But it is evident that unequal repreſentation and long continuance of the ſame men in office tend to deſtroy the influence of the people, and produce theſe baneful effects; theſe are circumſtances which have never failed to precede the loſs of public liberty in every ſtate. How far the juſt, natural, and conſtitutional influence of the people has been already abridged, you will be able to judge from the following facts. It appears, that the right of voting for repreſentatives, a power which every man who contributes to the welfare of ſociety ought certainly to ſhare, was exerciſed by the people at large, ſo low as the time of Henry the VIth; for in his reign we find a law depriving them of this power, and confining it to freeholders who poſſeſſed at leaſt the annual income of forty ſhillings. This was the beginning of injuſtice and uſurpation; and I wiſh the baneful precedent had terminated there; but uniform experience demonſtrates, that the firſt inſtant a nation ſubmits to have its rights infringed with impunity, is the commencement of its ſlavery. Since that firſt experiment of the people's tameneſs, repreſentation has every day become more unequal; till, in our own time, the ſtate of it is ſuch, that the two boroughs of Old Sarum and Newton, conſiſting each of a ſingle houſe, return

turn as many members as the city of London, whoſe riches and inhabitants are innumerable; the repreſentatives of the different boroughs of this kingdom, many of which do not contain twenty voters, exceed the repreſentatives of counties in proportion greater than that of 4 to 1; and 254 members out of 558, who compoſe the complete repreſentation of the kingdom, are returned by leſs than 6000 electors.

If you will now take the trouble of computing, how many of theſe boroughs which return ſo vaſt a majority of our omnipotent governors, are notoriouſly under the influence of the Crown; how many are the private property of nobles and opulent commoners; it will be eaſy to calculate the preciſe degree of influence which is left to the people. You will alſo ſee how juſtly we deſerve the excluſive title to freedom, which we arrogate to ourſelves; and our vaſt ſuperiority we enjoy over the ſlaves of the Continent, whoſe property and lives are held upon the precarious tenure of royal or miniſterial pleaſure.

As to the duration of our Parliaments, they were originally annual, and there are two expreſs laws of Edward III. confirming their right; but by a variety of acts, which I will not now enumerate, the laſt of which was the Septennial Bill, of 1716, they have been extended to the term of ſeven years. Thus, gentlemen, does it appear, that this nation has, even without a ſtruggle, reſigned all its real influence in the government; and that it now poſſeſſes almoſt as little controul over its own repreſentatives as over its rebellious children in America; who have exchanged this incomparable form of government, and all the bleſſings which it diſpenſes, for the inſupportable tyranny of being governed by their own will.

I have now ſhewn you, that what I am now exhorting you to demand, is your own undoubted right; not the deſtruction of the Conſtitution, or even a new-modelling of it, but only its reſtoration. The end we ſhould purſue is obvious; the only difficulty we ſhall find, is to aſcertain the means which may inſure ſucceſs. You are to conſider, that your deciſions, although they poſſeſs the right, have not the force of laws; that your committees have no legiſlative authority; and that all the ſpirited reſolves and memorials which they have publiſhed, will ſoon be as utterly diſregarded as the laſt Gazette; unleſs your firmneſs and future exertion ſhall give them additional force. What that exertion ought to be, I will now endeavour to explain. You are not here aſſembled to be excited to ſedition, violence, or rebellion; but to thoſe legal and conſtitutional means of redreſs, which are yet within your power; but I know of no ſuch means, unleſs they be the exertion of diſintereſtedneſs and ſagacity, at the next general election, and the ſolemn compact which you may then make with your Repreſentatives, to reſtore Annual Parliaments and a more equal repreſentation.—For, if you expect that a new Houſe of Commons, returned in the ordinary manner, the Members of which have neither entered into engagements, nor laid themſelves under ſuch obligations as may bind their honour, if not their conſcience, will be ſolicitous to gain any great point for the people, you are moſt miſerably deceived. It is now a century, at leaſt, that the trade of oppoſition has been carried on with equal violence and acrimony; during this period, we have repeatedly ſeen honours, offices, and emoluments change hands, and the Patriot of yeſterday

day become the Miniſter of to-day; but ſo far have the people been from ever obtaining redreſs, that freſh outrages have been heaped upon them by every new Adminiſtration. It is in the courſe of this period, that the game laws, the riot act, the exciſe, the ſtanding army, have been rivetted into the Government; that your moſt ſacred rights have been violated, firſt by the triennial, afterwards by the ſeptennial bill; and that two hundred millions of national property have been ſquandered, to defend German Principalities, conquer America, and hold the the imaginary balance of Europe; while your own ſcale was continually ſinking with the weight of poverty, ſlavery, and ruin. What renders the proſpect more alarming and extraordinary, is, that theſe things have been chiefly effected by that party, which has always pretended to be the patron and aſſertor of public liberty. And ſurely it muſt have been a moſt edifying ſpectacle, to ſee the very men that had depoſed one King for attempting to invade their liberties, reſigning thoſe liberties, without a ſtruggle, to his ſucceſſors; and founding the public ſecurity upon the glorious baſis of mercenary troops, national debts, and general corruption.—If any thing could cure mankind of the implicit confidence which they have ſo often repoſed to their own deſtruction, it would be the repeated experience, that no party was ever to be ſafely truſted with unlimited power, or was ever true to any thing but its own intereſt.

But I have heard that there is a party in the nation, compoſed of many reſpectable, at leaſt of many great and opulent men, which has always expreſſed a rooted averſion to every ſpecies of teſt and engagement.—Gentlemen, had I come here with hopes or fears for any thing but the public good, I ſhould have learned to proſtrate myſelf before the riſing ſun; and ſo be as blind to the defects of one party, as I was eagle-eyed to all the imperfections of the other.—But, conſiſtently with that ſpirit which has hitherto inſpired me, I muſt thus openly declare, that I derive the worſt omens for the public cauſe from the unwillingneſs to ſatisfy the public apprehenſions.—Does it then become a ſet of men, who have been reviling the eſtabliſhed Government for years, under the plauſible pretext of zeal for the rights and liberties of the people, to refuſe that very people the juſt and trivial ſatisfaction they demand?—Are heaven, and earth, and hell, to be moved; are powers, thrones, and dominations to be ſhaken, not that the great cauſes of all our miſeries may be removed, or the progreſs of deſpotiſm retarded for an inſtant, but that one garriſon may evacuate the place, and another march in; while we, like the wretched inhabitants of conteſted territories, gain nothing by battles, ſieges, and defeats, but a change of maſters?—I know not what you may feel upon this ſubject, but I muſt ſay with Brutus, that I am not diſputing about the character, or qualifications of a maſter, but becauſe I chuſe to have no other maſter than the laws and conſtitution of my country.

The arguments which are uſed againſt teſts and engagements, are of ſuch a nature as would almoſt make me doubt whether they can be ſeriouſly urged. It is pretended that the ſenſe of delicacy is ſo ſtrong in certain minds, as to ſtart even at the idea of reſtraint. But is there a man in this whole aſſembly that can be deluded by ſo flimſy a pretenſion?—Is there a ſingle perſon that pretends to this extravagant degree of refinement, that does not continually contradict it in all the intercourſes of private life?—Is there

there one of theſe gentlemen that does not continually give and inſiſt upon from others, in the management of his own eſtate, every aſſurance and every tie which is warranted by law or cuſtom ?—Is there one that would not openly deride the delicacy, or ſuſpect the *honeſty* of his neighbour, ſhould he refuſe to ſign a bond, or mortgage, becauſe it conveyed a diſingenuous ſuſpicion of his honour ?—And what is ſtill more home, is there a ſingle gentleman in this nation, however elevated may be his ſtation, however great his delicacy, that has refuſed a command in the army, a dignity of the church, a poſt of honour and emolument in the ſtate, or even a ſeat in either Houſe, becauſe he could not ſtoop to oaths, ſubſcriptions, or qualifying teſts ?—If this be truth, and that it is, I call you all to witneſs, muſt the people, the miſerable people, that have ſo often been the dupes of general promiſes and ſpecious impoſture, be alone debarred from uſing thoſe precautions which are indulged to every man in the paltry concerns of his own eſtate ?—Are your lives, your general property, your preſent ſecurity, and your future hopes of ſo little value, that they muſt be intruſted to the firſt ſolicitor, without the ſanction of an oath, or even the formality of a promiſe ; and this, at a time when the national dangers are ſwelled by theſe very gentlemen, on other occaſions, with all the pomp of rhetorical amplification ? If their delicacy be indeed ſo great, why do they ſtoop ſo low as to importune you for your votes and intereſt ?—Why do they ſolicit your ſupport, with the humility which would become beggars or dependents, inſtead of truſting to the ſilent dignity of their conduct, and waiting till you ſolicit them ?—Or if theſe things ſhould be ſubmitted to for the ſervice of their country, why do they ſcruple to ſubſcribe the public teſtimony of their own integrity, and to convince your reaſon ?

Nor do I more reſpect the abſurd doctrines which I hear concerning parliamentary independence.—It is a poſition as new, as it is already proved pernicious ; it was unknown to our plainer anceſtors, who thought themſelves obliged to conſult their conſtituents in dubious points, and to be the oracles of the people's will. Theſe men did not, I ſuppoſe, think themſelves qualified to deſtroy that nation which they were choſen to defend ; to vote away its beſt eſtabliſhed rights, fetter it with mercenary troops, or mortgage the general property for ages.—What have we gained by the innovation ?—That all theſe things have been already done, and that their actors imagine that their privileges are to be increaſed in proportion to their crimes. But if their natural independence be indeed ſo vaſt, let us pauſe before we again entruſt our freedom to thoſe who have ſo often abuſed the depoſit. The Houſe of Commons has but a ſubordinate exiſtence ; it is the organ of the people's voice ; the creature of their will ; and when we elect it, we have a right to chuſe in what degree, and under what modifications we will delegate our own unalienable rights.

Nor do we deſire to fetter their noble exertions in the ſublimer inſtances of parliamentary juriſdiction ; let our repreſentatives preſerve a perfect independence in all the great inquiries which intereſt themſelves ; let them ſend up as many congratulatory addreſſes as they pleaſe, preſerve the breed of pointers by wholeſome ſtatutes, and defend their manors and their fiſh-ponds with all the artillery of penal laws ;—but let the people decide for themſelves in what concerns the expreſſion of their own will,

and

and let the voice of millions for once prevail over the ſentiments of a few hundreds!

But theſe teſts, it is objected, are weak and inadequate to the propoſed end.—Weak as they are, they are the only reſtraints within your power, and if you are to omit them, becauſe there are men ſo openly flagitious as to break through every tie, you may as well aboliſh laws, and ſhut up courts of juſtice, becauſe never yet was form invented ſufficiently clear to prevent evaſion, or ſtrong enough to reſtrain intrepid villainy. But the very averſion which is expreſſed to teſts, is a ſufficient argument of their efficacy, and inſtead of relaxing your demands, ſhould only increaſe their obſtinacy. In private life, we do not intermit our caution, from the reluctance which is expreſſed to give us fair and honourable ſecurity; nor ought we to judge otherwiſe in what concerns the public, unleſs the welfare of a nation be of leſs importance than the preſervation of an eſtate. After all, gentlemen, this is an affair which ſolely relates to yourſelves; every man may chuſe whether or not he will ſubſcribe a teſt; but you are the only judges whether it be neceſſary to impoſe it. Men of the moſt generous and independent characters may doubt the utility of annual parliaments, and a more equal repreſentation; but in the preſent criſis of affairs, I would not give my vote for ſuch a man, though he were the great, the good, the diſintereſted Sir George Savile himſelf. The worſt that can happen to you from your oppoſing the private opinions of particular gentlemen, and it is fit that you ſhould know the extent of your danger, is, that you may be deprived of their ſervices in the enſuing parliament.—Upon this occaſion I cannot help applying the words of the Spartan matron, who, when her ſon had bravely fallen in fight, and ſhe was told, he had not left his equal, replied, with a noble indignation, "My ſon has indeed diſcharged his duty, and periſhed as a brave man "ought; but Sparta contains thouſands of citizens that are not inferior to "him;" thus, ſhould theſe gentlemen deſert us, I truſt that thouſands will yet remain their equals in honour, public ſpirit, and abilities, if not in rank and fortune, that will not deſert the public cauſe. And while there are ſuch men left, who will ſerve you upon your own honourable terms, I know not why you ſhould ſubmit to have conditions impoſed, either by individuals, or by factions; or why thoſe who dare oppoſe their kings, ſhould bend to an intereſted ariſtocracy. Kings are in general excluded from all the common virtues of humanity, while they are trained to every vice by the corruptions of their education; yet it ſometimes happens that they eſcape from the contagious influence of their rank, and dare encourage merit, or truſt themſelves to the affections of their ſubjects; but I have never yet heard of an ariſtocracy, from ancient Rome to modern Venice, that was not the univerſal tyrant and inquiſitor of the ſpecies.

After having thus expreſſed my own ſentiments; to prove that I am not ſingular, I ſhall beg leave to read to you two quotations from the writings of two gentlemen, who certainly could not be ſuſpected of entertaining any partiality for each other's opinions, upon the very ſubject we are conſidering. The firſt is from a letter written to the celebrated Junius, during the Duke of Grafton's adminiſtration, by Mr. Horne, a gentleman who has hitherto ſerved the public with as much diſintereſted zeal, firmneſs, and ability as any man: this is is the paſſage, "I underſtand

ſtand the two great leaders of oppoſition to be Lord Rockingham and Lord Chatham; under one of whoſe banners all the oppoſing Members of both Houſes, who deſire to get places, enliſt. I can place no confidence in either of them, or in any others, unleſs they will now engage, while they are out, to grant certain eſſential advantages for the public, when they ſhall be in adminiſtration. Theſe points they refuſe to ſtipulate, becauſe they are fearful leſt they ſhould prevent any future overtures from the court. To force them to theſe ſtipulations has been the uniform endeavour of Mr. Sawbridge, Mr. Townſend, Mr. Oliver, &c. and therefore they are abuſed by Junius.—It is a duty I owe to the memory of the late Mr. Beckford, to ſay, that he had no other aim than this, when he provided that ſumptuous entertainment at the Manſion-houſe for the Members of both Houſes in oppoſition. At that time he drew up the heads of an engagement, which he gave to me, with a requeſt that I would couch it in terms ſo cautious and preciſe, as to leave no room for future quibble and evaſion, but to oblige them either to fulfil to the intent of the obligation, or to ſign their own infamy, and leave it on record; and this engagement he was determined to propoſe to them at the Manſion-houſe, that either by their refuſal they might forfeit the confidence of the public, or by the engagement lay a foundation for confidence. When they were informed of the intention, Lord Rockingham and his friends flatly refuſed any engagement." Letters of Junius, letter liii.

The other paſſage which I ſhall ſubmit to your conſideration, is taken from a letter of Junius to John Wilkes, Eſq. dated the 7th of September 1771, and laid before the Society for the ſupport of the Bill of Rights.

"With regard to the ſeveral articles, taken ſeparately, I own I am concerned to ſee, that the great condition, which ought to be the *ſine quâ non* of parliamentary qualification, which ought to be the baſis (as it aſſuredly will be the only ſupport) of every barrier raiſed in defence of the conſtitution, I mean *a declaration upon oath to ſhorten the duration of Parliaments*, is reduced to the fourth rank in the eſteem of the Society; and even in that place, far from being inſiſted on with firmneſs and vehemence, ſeems to have been particularly ſlighted in the expreſſion—*You ſhall endeavour to reſtore annual Parliaments!*—Are theſe the terms which men, who are in earneſt, make uſe of, when the *ſalus reipublicæ* is at ſtake?" Letters of Junius, vol. ii. p. 351.

From what I have ſaid, it is evident that I conſider all pretences to a reformation, which do not comprehend the reſtoration of the people to their fundamental rights, as calculated to amuſe your hopes, but not to remove your miſeries. And I look upon every party, whatever may be their pretences to public zeal, which will not boldly and publicly ſubſcribe to the neceſſity of ſhortening the duration of Parliaments, and correcting the abuſes of repreſentation, as unworthy of your confidence. Be aſſured that the oppoſition of ſuch men to government is like the quarrel of certain ſects againſt the church of Rome, not for the ſake of diſpenſing light and liberty to mankind, but merely to appropriate infallibility to themſelves.—But it is your buſineſs, if you are ſeriouſly intereſted in your own or country's fate, to ſhew that you are to be no more circumvented by fraud, than to be terrified by danger. It belongs to me, and every honeſt man that poſſeſſes ſufficient boldneſs to hazard his eaſe or ſafety, to

warn you as aſſiduouſly againſt the ſecret ſelfiſhneſs of pretended friends, as againſt the bolder machinations of open enemies; but it is your part to prove by your diſcernment and reſolution that you deſerve the ſacrifices we make.—If you will only be true to yourſelves, you will have the proudeſt of the contending factions ſuing to you for your ſupport—without them you may be great, be free, be happy; without you they are only unſubſtantial ſhadows, glittering bubbles, and an empty name.—Nor think, that I here intend a general ſatire on either Nobility, or the Oppoſition; there are, I doubt not, many individuals in both, as much diſtinguiſhed by their public ſpirit, as by their rank; and if they will now meet the people on fair and conſtitutional grounds, we will march contentedly under their enſigns; we will not envy them either the emoluments, or the diſtinctions of public office; and they ſhall be more firmly ſeated upon our affections, than ever they could be upon our fears.—But if they wiſh to elude the honeſt wiſhes of the people; if they think to raiſe and ſtill the waves of popular diſcontent, as ſuits their intereſt or caprice *; if they would make us the mercenaries of faction, inſtead of the volunteers of freedom, it is neceſſary to learn, that though we wiſh to be free *with their aſſiſtance*, we *dare* be free without them.—But ſhould you be ſo weak, as to give up the only ſecurity which is in your power to take, you will be again betrayed as you have ſo often been already. In this caſe, the ſmall party which was really intereſted to reſtore you to freedom and to glory, muſt, although reluctantly, abandon your cauſe; for there are no human means of ſaving a people from ruin, which ſubmits to voluntary blindneſs and palpable impoſture.—You may this day erect a ſtandard, to which the genuine friends of their country will joyfully repair; and as the fate of battles is not decided by the number, but by the valour of the troops, thus will your fate depend not upon the oſtentatious appearance, but upon the real zeal of your defenders; and it is beſt that thoſe who would deſert you in the hour of danger, ſhould be obliged to declare themſelves at once, and leave your ranks before the conflict is begun.

After having ſo boldly delivered my ſentiments of others, it may be perhaps permitted me to ſay ſomething of myſelf. The motives which have impelled me to the dangerous ſervice I have this day choſen, are equally unmixed with intereſt or ambition.—The uniform tenor of my former life, voluntarily devoted to leiſure, ſtudy, and retirement, the independence of my fortune, and the contempt I have always ſhewn for the pageantry of the world, ought to be a ſufficient evidence of my ſincerity. All that is farther in my power, is publicly to declare the reſolution which I long have taken; that under no pretext whatever will I ſtoop to ſolicit favours from any party, or even to accept of wages from my country; and when I ſhall be convicted of attempting to evade theſe profeſſions, I will ſubmit without appeal to all the infamy I ſhall deſerve. A man that acts upon principles like theſe, can have nothing to hope even from the ampleſt ſucceſs, beyond the happineſs of his country, and the

* For an illuſtration of this paſſage ſee ſome late proceedings in the counties of Cambridge, Cheſter, and Buckingham.

conſciouſneſs

conſciouſneſs of having diſcharged his duty. And this conſciouſneſs, whatever elſe may be my fate, I truſt I ſhall bear with me into retirement.

Amidſt the wrecks of public liberty, and the ruin of this nation, there is little chance that I ſhall ever be deprived of at leaſt a competence; and he that poſſeſſes that is a welcome gueſt in every land;—he may with impunity deſert the falling fortunes of his country, and there is an aſylum now opened in the weſt, which will gather together the brave, the wiſe, the good from all the winds of Heaven. But it is you, my countrymen, with your children and your families, who are chained down to the ſpot which you now inhabit, that will be bruiſed beneath the iron hand of power, if you throw away your only remaining means of ſafety; and if you ſuffer another Houſe of Commons to be elected without an expreſs ſtipulation for your liberties, *actum eſt de republica*, the commonwealth is loſt, the people enſlaved for ever.—You ought to conſider yourſelves as deſperate gameſters, that are playing for their laſt ſtake;—manage it wiſely, defend it bravely, and may the event be fortunate to yourſelves, and ſalutary to your country.

It only remains that I propoſe to you the following motions which I have prepared upon this occaſion:

"1. It is reſolved by this Meeting, that annual Parliaments, and an equal repreſentation, are the undoubted conſtitutional rights of the Engliſh people.

"2. It is reſolved by this Meeting, that they will not ſupport any candidate to repreſent them, at the enſuing election, who will not publicly ſubſcribe to the following teſt: I, A. B. do hereby expreſs my full and perfect approbation of annual Parliaments, and an equal repreſentation, as the undoubted conſtitutional rights of the Engliſh people; and I do hereby voluntarily engage myſelf, by every tie of honour, to promote, to the utmoſt of my power, influence, and abilities, the reſtoration of theſe fundamental rights to the Engliſh people."

☞ Printed and diſtributed Gratis by the Society for Conſtitutional Information.